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ABSTRACT

This brief (two page) official combined position statement of the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), addresses issues in personnel standards for early education and intervention with young children having disabilities. These groups recommend the development of personnel standards for: (1) regular early childhood educators; (2) early childhood special educators; and (3) related services professionals. Specific philosophical assumptions are recommended to serve as the foundation for development of such personnel standards. Development of a structure for certification standards is also urged. Such development should be based on the inclusion of early childhood specialists on state agencies responsible for credentialling and certification, that standards be developed which are separate from existing general education or special education certifications, and that these standards apply to personnel serving children in the birth-to-eight range. Principles for developing certification standards should include the importance of graduate level training, and the value of outcome-based, not course-based, credentialling standards. (DB)

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ED 372 577

PERSONNEL STANDARDS FOR EARLY EDUCATION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

A Position of

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE)
The Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

It is the position of ATE, DEC, and NAEYC that individuals who work with children in early childhood settings must possess, to a degree congruent with their roles, the knowledge and skills for working with young children with special learning and developmental needs and their families. The increasing capacity internationally to provide comprehensive, coordinated services for young children with special learning and developmental needs and their families has significant implications for personnel preparation and credentialling. There is a need to ensure that personnel are both available and adequately prepared to meet the challenges identified by the field. There is a particular need to develop personnel standards that support the practice of inclusion, providing services for young children with disabilities in general early childhood programs and other community-based settings in which typically developing young children are also served. There is also a need to develop personnel standards that support the emerging trend for the development of unified early childhood/early childhood special education teacher training programs and unified state certification. These personnel standards are necessary for individuals functioning in a variety of roles, including but not limited to, the following: a) early childhood educators who work directly with young children in a variety of early childhood settings, who must accommodate children with a range of abilities and special needs and who must work collaboratively with families and other professionals; b) early childhood special educators who possess specialized knowledge and skills about young children with disabilities and their families and who may work directly with young children with disabilities or work in a collaborative relationship with early childhood educators, family members, and other professionals serving young children with special learning and developmental needs and their families; and c) related services professionals who provide consultation and support to families and other professionals, as well as direct treatment.

In recommending the development of personnel standards that apply to all of these roles, ATE, DEC and NAEYC recognize that the collaboration of professional organizations is critical to this process. The articulation of shared standards will provide a base from which states can develop certification, licensure, and credentialling guidelines. The desirable outcomes will be coherence of state standards and certification guidelines, congruence between personnel standards and standards of recommended practice in early childhood service delivery, an increased probability that services to young children with disabilities are delivered in the context of services to all young children, and that those services are provided by appropriately prepared personnel.

PHILOSOPHY AND ASSUMPTIONS GUIDING PERSONNEL RECOMMENDATIONS

ATE, DEC and NAEYC recommend that personnel standards be derived from empirically defensible knowledge
and clearly articulated philosophical assumptions about what constitutes effective early education and early intervention for young children with special learning and developmental needs and their families. These include:

- The uniqueness of early childhood as a developmental phase,
- The significant role of families in early childhood development and early education and intervention,
- The role of developmentally and individually appropriate practices,
- The preference for service delivery in inclusive settings,
- The importance of culturally competent professional actions, and
- The importance of collaborative interpersonal and interprofessional actions.

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THE STRUCTURE OF CERTIFICATION

It is the intention of ATE, DEC and NAEYC to provide a framework for personnel standards which is sufficiently flexible to allow states to plan within the context of local limitations, while also maintaining "content-congruence" (ATE/NAEYC, 1991) with the philosophy and assumptions. In developing a structure for certification standards, it is recommended that:

1. State agencies responsible for credentialling, certification, and/or licensure develop standards for all individuals who may be working with young children with disabilities, to include at least early childhood educators, early childhood special educators, and related services professionals.

2. As a first step in influencing the credentialling of all individuals working with young children, states develop free-standing certification or licensure guidelines for educational professionals working with young children and that these be separate from either existing general education or special education certifications. Certification/licensure standards should be clearly delineated for: a) an early childhood professional who will possess knowledge and skills related to general early childhood education as well as a common core of knowledge and skills related to young children with disabilities and their families; and, b) an early childhood special education professional who will possess specialized knowledge and skills related to young children with disabilities and their families, including those related to consultation with team members, as well as common core knowledge and skills related to general early childhood education. Such separate certifications should be linked clearly to enable professional mobility between roles, and should be constructed so as to support the possibility of unified early childhood/early childhood special education teacher training programs.

3. State certification standards apply to the birth-to-eight age range. Further, recognizing that it is difficult to prepare individuals to be skillful across this broad age range, it is recommended that certification standards incorporate options for subspecializations of birth-to-age three, age three-to-five, or age five-to-eight, with the opportunity to specialize in no more than two of these in a pre-service program.

CONTENT OF CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

Personnel standards must articulate common core knowledge and skills necessary for all individuals who work with young children with special learning and developmental needs and their families as well as the specialization knowledge and skills required for each of these roles. The identification of the content of credentialling standards should follow directly from the articulated philosophy and assumptions and reflect the spirit and letter of appropriate federal regulations related to serving young children with disabilities and their families. Credentialling standards should recognized that graduate level training is seen as a desirable part of a career ladder for all professionals working with young children and that as such it has the potential for improving the quality of services to all young children. Finally, credentialling standards should be outcome-based, not course-based, and ensure that personnel possess the knowledge and skills to work collaboratively as members of family-professional teams in planning and implementing appropriate services for young children with disabilities in a variety of community settings.

Approved by DEC Executive Board - December 14, 1993.
Approved by NAEYC Executive Board - March 23, 1994.
Approved by ATE Executive Board - April 30, 1994